

THE INTRODUCTION OF FULLY TRAINED NURSES  
TO THE HOBART TOWN GENERAL HOSPITAL  
ON 20 JANUARY 1876

by

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of professional medical nursing services to Australia is described, with special reference to Hobart.

FORWARD

A friend, Mrs. Ellen Sweet, a member of the Australian Trained Nurses' Association who trained at the Royal Hobart Hospital, recently spoke to me of the coming Centenary of the introduction of fully trained nurses to Tasmania, with the consequent reorganisation of the nursing staff at the old Hobart Town General Hospital. The Anniversary was to occur on 12 February 1976 and I was asked if I could tell her anything about the conditions leading up to this epoch making event in the Hospital's history.

I promised to provide the required information for her and the nursing profession and was to find gathering it a most interesting as well as, at times, difficult task.

A Sub-Committee of Nursing Sisters under the leadership of Miss Donnelly (Lady Superintendent) had already (25 August 1975) produced and published an excellent illustrated description of nurses and their conditions during this period at the Hobart General Hospital, as well as in its subsequent 100 years. My contribution will therefore only describe certain of the principal factors that led to the introduction of fully trained nurses to Sydney and, in sequence, to the Hobart General Hospital.

The keys to a fuller understanding of these changes were the devotion, courage and determination of three notable women. Two from England and the third a young Tasmanian woman, they were worlds apart geographically but were all three pre-eminently very able and practical and equal to the tasks they set themselves. The first was the immortal Florence Nightingale (1820-1910); the second, her trainee Miss Lucy Osburn; and the third, Miss Florence Marie Abbott (1849-1935?) of Hobart Town. It is fitting here to give an outline of their qualities and accomplishments during the quarter century (1850-1876) when they accomplished so much. Included, also, is a brief description of the old Hobart Town General Hospital, of the conditions there and at the Sydney Infirmary within the period under consideration. The overseas Institutions concerned vitally were the Nightingale School of Nursing at St. Thomas' Hospital, London; the Sydney Infirmary (later the Sydney Hospital), then in Macquarie Street, Sydney; and lastly the General (now Royal Hobart) Hospital. In the final decade of the century, later Matron of the Great, Brompton Hospital for Chests at London, Miss F. M. Abbott, a young Tasmanian woman also plays her considerable part.

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FOOTNOTE

This paper was prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians in Launceston in October 1975 but was not delivered owing to ill-health.

Miss Florence Nightingale came of a well established County family of considerable means; it was her fate to have in her nature a dominant strain of Philanthropy. This led her to undertake travels on the Continent, mainly in France and Germany, to master their languages and to study their Institutions caring for "the sick, infirm and aged". She had also the good fortune to have influential friends, especially Mr. Sydney Herbert (*q.v.*).

By mid-century (1853) Miss Nightingale had established an Institution in London for the care of elderly and infirm old ladies which she administered in person.

Again, early in the fifties of last century, Russia invaded Turkey. France and England, fearful of Russia's misuse of the Dardanelles, at once declared war. Their armies and men were soon on their way to the Crimean Peninsula in the Black Sea. The English fleet controlled the Baltic Sea as well as the Mediterranean. They had access to the Black Sea by their Turkish alliance. Very soon the English and French armies landed in the Crimea, fought the battle of the "Alma", and besieged the powerful fortress at Sebastopol. The Russians resisted strongly and the many allied wounded and sick were taken by sea to Varna in Bulgaria, thence again by sea to a disused military barracks of the Turks, Scutari, near Constantinople. This old Turkish barracks had been converted by the British into a large hospital capable of housing 2000 sick and wounded men. It was found to be most unsuitable for use as a hospital, among other deficiencies, sanitation was almost non-existent. Rumours reached England of a bad break-down of administration, and Mr. (later Sir) Russell Howard, the "Times" correspondent, in due course sent lengthy reports to his Editor in London on conditions and medical care in the wards. This report in the "Times" disclosed a horrifying state of affairs. The wounded and sick, dirty and neglected, lying on the floors of straw, in their uniforms, the latter stained and stiff with blood and ordure. Added to this, there was little or no sanitation, an almost total absence of necessary Hospital utensils and, again, a break-down in supply of essential medicaments.

All this confusion and inefficiency was stressed by Mr. Russell Howard, who also pointed out these conditions were in marked contrast to those of our Allies, indeed the French military hospitals were well ordered and organised, and the envy of all ranks of the British army. The public reaction to the "Times" articles was tremendous and Mr. Herbert, then Secretary of State for War, discussed these terrible conditions with Miss Nightingale. Miss Nightingale, eager to help, volunteered at once to enrol women with some training to go with her to the Crimea and serve in the hospitals. Within a fortnight 60 ladies, including 10 Roman Catholic nursing sisters, were on their way to the "scene of war". Although certain high ranking Army officers did not welcome this startling feminine "takeover" (Miss Nightingale's official appointment was as "Lady Superintendent of the female division in the hospitals of the East") the sick and wounded received her and her helpers with rapture. The first reforms were with sanitation and cleaning. She was officially known as the "Lady in Charge" but is remembered as the "Lady of the Lamp".

Miss Nightingale recognised that the bad sanitary conditions had to be remedied first and the death rate of 42% in September was reduced to only 2% by the following June. The recurring assaults upon Sebastopol, apart from the wounded, brought about a terrific increase of casualties with frost bite and cold. Infestation by lice also was widespread and both Typhus and Typhoid Fever were rife. Cholera also played its part.

Miss Nightingale herself went on a brief visit to see conditions actually at the front on the Crimean Peninsula and became very ill. It is not known whether her condition was due to Typhoid or Cholera. Fortunately in due course she made a good recovery. She was to live until 1910, being ninety years of age when she died. With the cessation of hostilities, she arrived back in England by a French warship and the people of England lionized her and "took her completely to their hearts".

An autographed letter of thanks from Queen Victoria (and later a jewelled and enamelled brooch worked by Prince Albert himself) was presented to her when she visited the Queen at Balmoral.

A Fund to recognise the work of these ladies was started and rapidly topped £60,000. Miss Nightingale was unwilling to receive this sum personally but was delighted to agree to a suggestion to found a "Nurses Home" and school for nursing at St. Thomas' Hospital, London. She would not undertake its administration but for many years was in close touch with its Matron as its "Supervisor".

Out of the blue in 1857 came an appeal for her at her school at St. Thomas, to advise the Government of New South Wales, who were in difficulties. Such then was the international reputation of this wonderful woman.

In Macquarie Street, Sydney, the Legislative Council of N.S.W. and the Sydney Infirmary were situated side by side, in part sharing the same roof. The old Building having been the military hospital. The early Colonial building, established by Governor Macquarie, probably had a minimum of sanitation.

Parliament was in session that summer and Mr. Henry Parkes, Colonial Secretary, was gravely perturbed by the foul smells coming from the Infirmary, almost certainly caused by deficient lavatories and the open sewers. Added to this, the bodies and effects of the patients who probably were rarely washed or kept clean. The "nuisance" was so obnoxious and consistant as to actually hamper the business of the House and its political debates, so the Government of New South Wales instructed Mr. Parkes, as Colonial Secretary, to write to Miss Nightingale and seek her assistance, actually inviting her to come in person to the Colony.

In due course she replied and agreement was reached by which she would send a selected team of nurses to Sydney to reorganise the nursing and administration of the Infirmary. The agreement was to be for a term of three years and, at its termination, if desired, their return passages to London. The Matron of St. Thomas' Nursing School selected Miss Lucy Osburn and six senior nurses, the Misses Miller, Blundell, Chant, Turriff, Haldane and Barker.

There is ample official documentation of the work of these ladies. Their personal qualities with their interactions, flirtations and jealousies also have been recorded in an excellent article in the *Australian Medical Journal* of 1 May 1965, under the title of "Miss Lucy Osburn and her Nightingale Nurses", by Dr. M. P. Sussman.

This is extremely interesting and revealing but provides no clue as to what was done in regard to the smells of the Infirmary, which probably should have been referred to an architect or the Public Works Department. Miss Freda McDonnell's book, "Miss Lucy Osburn and her Nurses" should be compulsory reading for every Australian nursing graduate, describing poor Lucy Osburn, so young, and relatively inexperienced in comparison with her six head nurses. Miss McDonnell tells Miss Osburn's story in regard to the subsequent nursing problems and their difficulties. Many of these were recorded by the Royal Commission on the Infirmary at Sydney in its report.

Lucy never flinched in spite of only partial support from her Board of Management, and remained at the Sydney Infirmary (later the Sydney Hospital) from 1868 to 1884, in latter years serving as the Matron. She resigned in 1884 and returned at once to London, spending the remainder of her short nursing life working in England, principally in the slums of London, until she died in 1891.

The writer has seen no mention of a written report of Miss Osburn to the Government of New South Wales. It may well be that one exists in the Archives of New South Wales or at the Nightingale Home at St. Thomas' Hospital.

So far little has been said of conditions at the Old Hobart Town General Hospital, only recently taken over by the Colonial Government. It is proper at this stage to consider certain of the changes that were taking place during the 19th Century.

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The coming of responsible Government to Tasmania in mid-nineteenth century had resulted in the withdrawal of British troops from the Colony and the transfer

from the Colonial Office in London to the new responsible Government those officials and the public buildings essential to the community. The old Colonial Hospital naturally was included. The transfer of these buildings to the new Government came automatically at the opening of 1860, but already, on 23 September 1858, a committee had been appointed by the Colonial Secretary at Hobart Town "to inquire into the State and Efficiency, of those Institutions for charitable usage, which had been hitherto supported or aided by the [Imperial] Government".

On 19 September 1859 the Hobart Town Gazette reported the appointment of a Board of Management, to administer the "General Hospital" and the "Brickfields" establishment for paupers. Actually, since the early eighteen-twenties, "The Colonial Hospital" had been situated on the site of the present Royal Hobart Hospital. The old freestone two storey building erected about 1827 having, after almost a century of service, been demolished in 1921 and the present Royal Hobart Hospital complex commenced on its site.

As remembered by the present writer (then a Medical student) in 1903, the old building was a fine solid freestone structure, with wide verandahs on the front northern aspect. It contained four large wards on both floors with lavatories and baths at hand at the rear. The back of the wards on both floors were "glassed in" which enabled the convalescent patients to be served with their meals from large Huon Pine tables, whilst sitting on movable wooden forms. Here, too, the utensils were washed up and dried. The sisters of each ward had a small office, but the staff nurses and nurses had neither privacy nor comfort until their hours of duty were over and they returned to the Nurses Home.

The lavatories made their location obvious but, with the installation of sewers, they were not quite such a nuisance. Full surgical sterilisation or Asepsis were only available in the operating theatre.

Many of the ward utensils then in use were made of pewter and on the dressing trays all basins and flat trays were of this metal. Memory does not record, but I seem to remember at this period, hot water being laid on to any hand basins in the wards. In these years, there was always a seasonal epidemic of Typhoid Fever, requiring special wards for both sexes.

On 1 January 1860, when the Colonial Government took over, the hospital site was ample - with the one big building and a dispensary. Its hospital administration and offices were clustered around the old original brick hospital, some 300 yards away on the southern boundary of the site. At the time of the transfer, this building was still overlooking the town rivulet and harbour and housed the dispensary with portion of the Administrative quarters, as well as staff offices and the nurses' dining room. It is probable also that it accommodated certain of the female patients, in fact, it was still termed the "old female hospital" at this time.

In the hospital all the patients were classified as (1) male patients, (2) male invalids who were ranked as patients, (3) female patients in the building at the back, (4) female invalids ranking as patients and (5) females and children of tender age.

The staff at the time of the takeover consisted of a House Surgeon (Dr. G. Washington Turnley, salary not disclosed), a medical clerk (Mr. John F. Cox at £150 p.a.), Mr. Charles Seager, Superintendent of male patients (£156), Matron (Mrs. Peel, possibly wife of an overseer at £125), Dispenser (Mr. John Seale at £91.5.0), two Gatekeepers receiving £77.7.6 each, a Messenger £79.7.6, assistant at medical stores at £90.10.0, and the Tailor, Messenger, Baker, Cook, Gardener, Watchman, 6 nurses (female) and a female Cook and Laundress each receiving 2/- a day. The number of wardsmen was not given.

On 19 December 1859 there appeared in the "Hobart Town Gazette" the names of ten gentlemen to "constitute a Board of Management for the sick and invalid departments belonging to the medical department of the Government at Hobart". In the course of December and early in January, four more names were added including the then Colonial Secretary and the Mayor of Hobart.

During the next 20 years, four Honorary Medical officers Drs. H. Butler, W. L. Crowther, Doughty and T. C. Smart, effected many improvements in the hospital. Dr. Smart as Chairman of the Hospital Board for the long period of 27 years was responsible for radical improvements, including new Officers' quarters, enlarging the Dispensary, reconstruction of bathrooms and sanitary arrangements; and the laying of piped gas and water services. His great services are commemorated by a fine brass Tablet in the main foyer of the hospital. He died 26 March 1896.

Although material improvements were made at the hospital during its first fifty years, as a whole it had remained stagnant and old fashioned. Nevertheless vital changes were stirring in the community, influenced by advances in sanitation and medical thought overseas. Drastic changes were obvious in the United Kingdom, especially in urban sanitation. This applied especially to the crowded streets and habitations in the cities following the Industrial Revolution.

The streets and houses generally were divided into terraces and, although large families were the rule, often only one privy was shared between two houses "situated back to back".

At Hobart the houses of city residents, with few exceptions, were dependent on the removal of the pans of galvanised iron during the night by heavy black horsedrawn waggons. The collected pans were then loaded on a river steamer, which took this cargo down the estuary of the Derwent inside the "Iron Pot" lighthouse, where it was either landed for use by the farmers or poured over the side from the individual pans which were then sluiced with water and given a lining of liquid tar before going into circulation again.

At the turn of the century, Dr. Gregory Sprott, M.D. (Glasgow), became a Resident Surgeon at the hospital. He afterwards went into private practice, becoming a "City Health Officer". By persistent efforts, he educated and persuaded the City Council to institute the Metropolitan Drainage Scheme and by this means all residences became seweried and immediate improvement followed. Fly-borne Typhoid Fever, always endemic and each late summer, epidemic, became less and less, as did much other fly-borne diseases which now are very rarely seen.

Again, by this time there were two infant Medical Schools at the Melbourne and Sydney Universities, where the medical students were made well aware of these essential changes and canvassed for them.

Altogether the general public were becoming more aware of disease and its causes and prevention. The arrival in 1868 of Miss Osburn's Young Ladies and their reforms at the Sydney Infirmary would be fully known in Hobart, and obviously created widespread dissatisfaction in the organisation and administration of our own hospitals.

There were, as it chanced, two young Tasmanians who were aware of the pressing need for radical changes in the nursing organisation and staffing of the two principal hospitals of Tasmania and possessing the ability and vocation to improve matters.

Firstly Florence Marie Abbott (1847-1935), then approaching maturity, with a definite vocation to devote herself to the nursing and care of the sick and who had already resolved to study under Miss Lucy Osburn at Sydney.

Secondly, George Washington Turnley M.R.C.S., Resident Surgeon Superintendent of the Hobart General Hospital who was born in the U.S.A. near 1800 and arrived in Van Diemen's Land with his parents and two siblings by the ship "Lord Rodney" in 1825. Possibly his father returned to the U.S.A. It is known George Washington in his late youth and early manhood became a sailor and adventurer and he was also believed to have had a spell as a gold digger in California or Victoria, or possibly in both places.

In 1855, he gained his Diploma M.R.C.S. England and on 26 November of the same year, registered his qualifications in Tasmania and commenced practice. He held no appointment in the Colonial medical system until appointed as a Resident Surgeon to the Hobart General Hospital from 1860 to 1866. This was

followed by a similar appointment as Surgeon Superintendent of the Launceston General Hospital from 1867 to 1869. A re-appointment as Surgeon Superintendent at the Hobart General Hospital followed in 1870 and continued until 1877, when he became Medical Officer to the Government Establishments for Paupers and the Queen's Asylum, now St. John's Park, New Town.

Thus he gained wide experience in hospital administration, especially in the two principal Tasmanian hospitals. He was very soon to find cause for dissatisfaction.

As Surgeon Superintendent at Hobart, he found in the early eighteen seventies its nursing personnel were 16 in number, 10 males and 6 females. The Matron, Mrs. Peel, was concerned with the nursing of the female patients and infants. Mr. Seager was responsible for the four male wards and the male nursing staff. Very soon Dr. Turnley began finding considerable difficulty in obtaining wardsmen to train in nursing duties and finally drew the attention of the Colonial Secretary to his wants and consequent difficulty in staffing the Institution. This essential need does not seem to have been referred to the Board of Management, nor apparently had Mrs. Peel been approached on the matter.

In the early eighteen eighties, the new freestone buildings of a female hospital were erected; and only recently have been demolished. The transfer of male patients in 1921 to the Royal Hobart Hospital main block followed. The old building had been invaluable at times of great emergency, notably during the Second World War, when it accommodated service personnel not eligible for Repatriation and A.I.F. benefits.

It is sad but true that, throughout its long existence, the hospital seems to have been the sport and victim of both parties during parliamentary sessions. It was used, if possible, to discredit the then Government by disclosures of neglect or other irregularities. Through the decades the long reports of parliamentary committees and Royal Commissions have been printed, inquiring into allegations of faulty treatment and the errors and omissions of the staff, but it was rarely that action was seen to have been taken when such accusations were confirmed. Indeed, many of the complaints were of minor significance but useful for political issues.

However, during the period now under consideration between 1850 and 1875, the functioning of the hospital seems to have been relatively stable. With the change of administration on 1 January 1860, a Board of Management became responsible and for 20 years the hospital seems to have been reasonably well controlled and the organisation on the whole improved.

Dr. T. C. Smart, Chairman of the Board, reorganised the old original hospital buildings at the southern end of the grounds as female wards and offices for staff. Again during his administration, a bequest enabled the provision of a modern operating theatre with facilities for sterilising for general hospital purposes.

Dr. Smart must have seen the completion of the splendid large freestone female hospital at the southern end, and also the Nurses Home, facing Argyle Street, now demolished and replaced by a large Obstetrics and Gynaecological Department. For a while in this period some of the female patients were housed in premises on the other side of Liverpool Street; later they vacated this location which became the police court. For a while, I understand the night staff went there for quiet rest. Further development made construction of a new Nurses Home on the hospital site essential and the fine new building facing Campbell Street now serves all their purposes.

Somehow we have digressed from consideration of the pressing needs of Dr. Turnley, and his lack of wardsmen, and his writing to the Colonial Secretary for assistance. Fortunately for all concerned, the Colonial Secretary knew where to look for support — remembering Miss Florence Abbott, then nearly twenty, the accomplished daughter of his colleague, Major Edward Abbott (formerly Deputy Judge Advocate General on the staff of the Lieut. Governor Davey of the Royal Marines). Miss Abbott who was then nursing privately in Sydney had a vocation for nursing, having studied in the Sydney Infirmary under

Miss Lucy Osburn. She (Miss Abbott) was invited by the Colonial Secretary to come with a team of trained nurses from Sydney and take the position of the first Lady Superintendent of the hospital. To effect this he sent a member of his staff to approach Miss Abbott on the matter. That lady expressed her interest - sent her testimonials from prominent Sydney medical men and wrote a letter of conditions which would have to be met (Appendix 1) before she would accept the responsibility offered to her.

Also, she drew the attention of the Colonial Secretary to the conditions of engagement of the four Sydney ladies - the Tasmanian Government proposed that Miss Abbott should have a saloon passage to Hobart Town on "S. S. Tasmania" while the nurses, the Misses Laura, Fanny and Rosamund Holder and Miss Mary Gordon, were to travel steerage. This matter was at once adjusted and Miss Abbott arrived in Hobart on 23 December by the "S. S. Tasmania" while her nurses followed as cabin passengers on 14 and 21 January 1876. The final agreement with the Colonial Secretary was that the system of female nursing should begin early in 1876 with Miss Abbott bringing four trained nurses with her. Her salary to be £80 p.a. with free quarters, light and rations, and additional young Tasmanian women to be engaged to undergo training. Such local girls were offered quarters, fuel, light and rations with a salary of £36.10.0 p.a. These conditions it was presumed would attract local young ladies to apply to be trained. Such local engagements were to be for 12 months.

Actually conditions at the hospital were such that before the end of January, Miss Abbott was expressing doubt as to whether she could carry out her duties with fairness to herself, as apparently she was expected to administer only the lower wards, leaving the four male wards upstairs to be managed independently of herself. Her relations with Mr. Seager who controlled the male wards upstairs, appear to have become and remained very strained.

From time to time in this narrative, allusion has been made to Miss Florence Abbott's abilities. Whilst the broad outline of her career is known, one can find very little in regard to her youth and education. Certainly we are well aware of the careers of her immediate family. The present writer did have opportunities as, on two occasions, Miss Deighton, her lifelong friend, visited Hobart. Contact was made with her, but she was only questioned on Major Edward Abbott's (her father's) career. The other opportunity was when old Mrs. Thomas Hopkins, herself a member of Miss Abbott's nursing staff, was my patient. At that time I had no idea of Miss Abbott's career after leaving Hobart Town and so her memories were not obtained. So in what follows I can be certain only of the dates of her appointments and services in later life. One can only guess at her education, her early friends and their influence.

#### MISS FLORENCE MARIE ABBOTT

On 20 July 1849 Florence Marie Abbott was born to William and Georgina Abbott (née Bilton) at Hobart Town.

Her arrival at Hobart Town from Sydney toward the middle of 1875 with six fully trained nurses to reorganise the nursing staff at the Hobart General Hospital was the climax of her long and distinguished career in nursing. She died in England about 1935, having played a brilliant part in this local drama; but we know little of her personal life and attributes. A great deal has to be inferred or even guessed.

We may however consider certain facts that influenced her toward the life of a professional nurse and career of arduous service to the community. Certainly she came of good stock; her grandfather Major Edward Abbott, born in the West Indies, was commissioned to the 34th Regiment, but later transferred to the 104th or N.S.W. Regiment - known to the long suffering residents of New South Wales as the "Rum Corps". He was of high character and studious habits and in 1812 was posted to Hobart Town as Deputy Judge Advocate General to Colonel Thomas Davey R.M., Lt. Governor of Van Diemen's Land. His son William was born at Hobart Town on 5 May 1826 and married Georgina Bilton at St. Peter's Church, Hamilton, on 29 October 1846. From this union Florence Marie was born on 20 July 1849.



PLATE 1 Miss Lucy Osburn, Lady Superintendent, Sydney Infirmary (later Hospital) - 1868-1884.



PLATE 2      The Sydney Infirmary, 1870  
by courtesy of the Library of the Royal Australasian College of  
Physicians, Sydney.

I have been able to discuss her younger years lately with her very distant cousin, Mrs. Knight of Hobart, but she cannot tell me anything of her early education nor have I been able to trace any portrait likeness to her except in nursing groups at Sydney.

In a very recently published commemorative book issued by a small committee under the present Lady Superintendent (Miss Donnelly) of the Royal Hobart Hospital, two contemporary photographs are reproduced, one a very striking one of a group of nurses and two Resident House Surgeons of the Royal Hobart Hospital during her regime 1876-81, Mrs. Hopkins being in the group. The other a portrait of herself in her uniform as a Head nurse or Sister, possibly taken at Sydney a little before the same period.

It must be assumed that, with her grandfather's military status and her family's pastoral relations (three of her aunts had married into early Colonial families of Van Diemen's Land), she would have had sufficient knowledge and a certain share of what social and intellectual life the Colony afforded.

Actually, the late Professor E. Morris Miller, with whom the writer was on close personal terms, on several occasions emphasised in his conversation, his firm opinion that, during the period before mid-century in Van Diemen's Land, the standards of literary and scientific thought and writing and of the Press were of a very much higher distinction than those of the neighbouring Colonies. He based his opinions on his professional studies of writings and of the Press while compiling his great work on the Bibliography of Australia. It is proper to assume Miss Abbott had good manners and a good education and "grew up" in circles and a home in which affairs of the old world, and especially in closer Sydney, would be very much discussed when the occasional delivery of mails or travellers brought news of outstanding events, discoveries and developments.

Undoubtedly the small isolated community in V.D.L. followed with intense interest the arrival of belated news when England and her allies were engaged desperately with the Russian army at the Crimea. Equally, as some little comfort, they would learn of the wonderful work of Miss Florence Nightingale and her team of volunteers who were striving to bring comfort, cleanliness and hope to the wounded and sick in extemporised hospitals at Scutari and elsewhere.

When Florence Abbott was 19 years old in 1868, and Miss Osburn and her team arrived, she was early aware of its significance. She made up her mind, possibly actively discouraged by her relations and friends, that she would proceed to Sydney and study the new profession of nursing under Miss Lucy Osburn. Miss Deighton stressed that Florence had long made up her mind but in fact did not join Miss Osburn at the Sydney Infirmary until 1871.

It must be stressed here that the exponents of female nursing in Australia at this time were much the same tough types from the penal colony as their male counterparts. From their origin it followed that they possessed very little education, no special training and with no vocation for this career.

Florence Abbott came from a well disciplined home and was accustomed to exert authority.

Such then was her life in Hobart Town. During 1867 and 1868 no doubt the arrival of the nurses at Sydney was discussed in her circle eagerly and fully in all its aspects.

But five years were to pass before she moved to Sydney and on 4 July 1873 she was accepted as a Probationer. It may be assumed that her immediate family were in no way co-operative and any permission to enrol for the course of nursing would, in the first place, possibly have to be from the office of the Colonial Secretary at Hobart Town, the Hon. T. S. Chapman or his successor. What we do know is that, on 5 July 1873 she was accepted as a Probationer at the Sydney Infirmary at a "wage" of £20 p.a. An interview would no doubt have been required.

She was officially described as aged 24 and it is stated she was born in Tasmania, that her mother had remarried and was living in New Zealand. In the words of this questionnaire, she seems to have been interested in private nursing whilst in Hobart, thus following the example of Miss Nightingale. She is noted also as being a second cousin of W. Fortescue, a prominent medical man then practising in Sydney. Her religion is given as Church of England with a note of reserve. Did Miss Osburn herself a fervent Anglican, so early suspect that her pupil, Miss Abbott, was not deeply religious and lacked faith.

Florence now removed from her family, was perhaps becoming homesick and almost certainly overworked. It has seemed to me as House Surgeon at two hospitals that Probationers must in almost all instances be depressed at the variety, and disgusted at the nature, of some of the many menial duties to which they are directed.

Her whole hospital years show her to have been individualistic, high spirited and fond of company. So with various ups and downs, her nursing training went on until March of 1875 (perhaps a month sooner than usual) and a decision was made that she was not suitable for the duties of a Sister. My own feeling is that she and Miss Osburn were uncomparable.

A visit home to Tasmania followed in 14 March. Three weeks later she returned to Sydney and engaged in private nursing.

She must have impressed Hobart Town on that brief visit to her home for, as has been written, it will be remembered that Dr. G. W. Turnley was in difficulties with his staff. Be this as it may, it is history that the way was open for the claim of Florence to be appointed Matron to the Hobart Town Hospital, factors to be weighed by the Colonial Secretary and for him to decide to use his influence to help her.

The keeper of the nursing records at the Sydney Hospital at this period, noting this appointment, states "she (Miss Abbott) asked many of my nurses to go with her but none would". She was wrong, four of the nurses at the Sydney Hospital did accept Miss Abbott's proposals. It is only proper here to record the names of these ladies who accepted and came with her to the Hobart General Hospital, viz. the Misses Laura, Fanny and Rosamund Holder and Miss Mary Gordon.

Previously the then Colonial Secretary, the Honourable T. D. Chapman, eager to embody Dr. Turnley's recommendations, may well have discussed terms with Miss Abbott who was on holiday at Hobart Town.

This lady then laid down in black and white (Appendix A) the essential conditions under which she would agree to become Matron of the hospital. These provided for her complete control of the nurses and the numbers and rank of the nursing staff, their salaries, uniforms, etc. Also, that she alone was to be responsible to the Board for the control of her probationers and nurses and sisters.

After settling in, conditions at the hospital were found very unsatisfactory and, in January 1876, Miss Abbott complained to the Colonial Secretary that she "doubted" whether she could do justice to herself and the hospital by undertaking the management of the lower wards only, leaving the upper male wards to be managed independently of her staff.

The report of the Royal Commission of 23 January 1877 gives ample evidence of her dislike of Mr. Seager, who apparently was responsible for the nursing and care of the patients in the upper male wards of the main building. She controlled only the lower wards for females. She laboured and endured at the General Hospital for a little over five years in all.

Her decision was then made to proceed to England and take a hospital appointment there. In the United Kingdom, we may picture her welcomed by the relations of both her grandfathers and her grandmothers, of good service families and with influence; for surely she would need plenty of that to ensure her success when in London she applied with "many others" for the vacant position of Matron of the Great Brompton Hospital for Chests in London. An

inquiry by my friend Professor Bryan Gandevia for information of her years there indicate that they were without any notable difficulties or incidents.

Miss Abbott was appointed Matron of the Brompton Hospital from 14 applicants for the position. She held the post for some years and eventually married Dr. Taylor, who was several years younger than herself. They lost two children in infancy but when she left the hospital she adopted two children. During the First World War, she bought some cottages near her own home in Jervis Close, Steyning, Sussex and took in orphans and other children needing shelter and care as the result of the war. She maintained this work until she was too old to continue. Miss Deighton visited her in 1929 and in 1930 Florence Abbott sent the last of her orphans, then aged 11, to Miss Deighton who had returned to Australia.

This child, now married, lives in Hobart but her address is not known. Miss Abbott died in 1935-36 aged about 85.

Miss Deighton also died about 1974 and so much of this section is conjectural rather than factual, lacking the information she could have given.

We have followed the principals that brought the profession of nursing to Tasmania and the characters and difficulties of the four personalities concerned. All four served their country well but for the foundation of this vital knowledge in Tasmania, we are indebted to Miss Florence Marie Abbott, whose work should rank only in lesser degree with the accomplishments of Miss Nightingale and Miss Osburn. Some memorial to Miss Abbott and her services should be afforded to her in this state and her attainments thus remembered and appreciated by succeeding generations of fully trained nurses and the country as a whole.

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It is pleasing to add that the very high standards of nursing acquired and maintained by the graduates from the Royal Hobart Hospital has been more than maintained by Miss F. M. Abbott's distinguished successors as Lady Superintendent, viz.

Matron Miss Harriett Munro	Lady Superintendent	1887-1896
Matron Johnston Turnbull	Lady Superintendent	1896-1917
Matron A. A. Gluyas	Lady Superintendent	1917-1931
Matron Gladys Lade	Lady Superintendent	1931-1935
Matron M. McGrath	Lady Superintendent	1935-1938
Matron Ruth Cockayne	Lady Superintendent	1938-1946
Matron Jean O. Brown	Lady Superintendent	1946-1963
Matron Daphne Hill	Lady Superintendent	1963-1966
Matron Miss P. G. Donnelly	Lady Superintendent	1966-

APPENDIX 1

A Letter from Miss Florence M. Abbott, dated 7 April 1875, to the Hon. T.S. Chapman, M.H.A., Chief Secretary, relating to his invitation to her to accept the proposed position of the first Lady Superintendent of the Hobart General Hospital.

With this Miss Abbott enclosed copies of testimonials from leading Sydney medical men (also reproduced).

She states the conditions in regard to the proposed nursing reorganisation, required to be met, before she feels she can accept this important and unique appointment.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hobart Town  
7 April 1875

I shall feel obliged by your looking over the enclosed letters - as I wish you to know, the opinion of some of the medical staff of the Sydney Hospital, as to my competency to superintend the management of the nursing arrangements of your hospital.

I have considered the offer you have made to me, of undertaking the superintendence of the nursing staff of the Hobart Town Hospital, and shall be happy to accept it under the following conditions.

That the Lady Superintendent has sole control over the nursing staff.

For the perfect order, cleanliness, and efficient working of the Hospital, the staff must consist of -

4 Head Nurses { This provides for night nursing  
11 Probationers {  
1 Wards man  
1 Scrubber  
1 Domestic servant  
1 Needle woman - for cutting out and to assist in making the patients uniforms

The accommodation required for this use, to consist of -

Mess room - dormitories - bathroom and lavatory - kitchen - work room &c - with private room for the Lady Superintendent.

The ages of the Misses to be, not under 20 or over 40.

In making the new arrangement would especially urge the use of a uniform, both for the staff and patients. The comfort and cleanliness of the patients, and the general appearance of the Hospital, is much increased by this regulation.

I shall be ready to enter upon the duties of Lady Superintendent, when your arrangements are completed, which I understand will be some time in August.

I am prepared to engage from Sydney, 4 trained nurses to take the situations of Head Nurses - but until I have communicated with them, I do not feel at liberty to mention their names, ages &c - I shall be happy to communicate these particulars on my return to Sydney.

As I should insist upon their making an engagement for a year, all their expenses from Sydney, to Hobart Town, ought I think to be paid.

It is understood I believe that I have authority to offer £36.10 a year to each of the 4 Head Nurses.

Should any difficulty arise in engaging 11 Probationers here, I shall be happy to do my best in carrying out any instructions you may send me, for engaging them in Sydney.

I am Sir  
Yours Obediently  
Florence Abbott

The Colonial Secretary

Any letter to Miss Abbott to be addressed to the care of

Dean  
Sydney  
New South Wales

Testimonials received from Miss Florence Abbott.

No. 1

This is to certify that Miss Florence Abbott has been engaged as a probation sister in the Sydney Infirmary for the last two years, most of which time she has been in my ward.

I have had every reason to be satisfied with Miss Abbott's zeal, industry, and attention to her duties. She has always shown great kindness and humanity to the patients under her charge.

I understand that she desires an appointment in the Benevolent Asylum. For this I can strongly recommend her.

(signed) W. Maclaurin  
M.D.

187 Macquarie Street  
Sydney  
March 4th 1875

No. 2

March 8th 1875

I have much pleasure in bearing testimony to the qualifications of my friend Miss Abbott as a Nurse. For nearly two years she has been acting as a Lady Nurse to the Sydney Infirmary, and during that time, I have had ample opportunity of forming a most favourable opinion of her skill and of her kindness and attention to the sick under her charge.

(signed) Walter W. Spencer  
Honorary Surgeon  
Sydney Infirmary

No. 3

It gives me great pleasure to bear testimony to the very superior acquirements of Miss Florence Abbott as a Nurse; I have had many opportunities of witnessing her career in that capacity in the Sydney Infirmary during the last two years, and I have been in every respect favourably impressed with the manner in which she performed her duties.

(signed) Charles K. MacKellar M.B.  
Hon. Surgeon Sydney Infirmary

College Street  
Sydney  
17th March 1875

No. 4

March 14th 1875  
Lyons Terrace  
Sydney

Miss Florence Abbott has undergone for two years, a course of training as probationer and Nurse at the Sydney Infirmary where she has been under my immediate observation for most of that time. She has a good and cheerful disposition with unusual activity and intelligence; has had unusual opportunities for seeing Medical & Surgical practice and considerable experience in nursing cases of severe operation and injury. She is, I think, already a competent and trustworthy nurse, and is, I believe, sure by experience, to become thoroughly fit for any Office of control or direction in the profession to which she has devoted herself.

(signed) G. Fortescue M.B. London  
Late Honorary Surgeon  
Sydney Infirmary

No. 5

Sydney Infirmary  
8th March 1875

I have much pleasure in expressing the high opinion I have formed of Miss Florence Abbott's ability and skill as a trained nurse. During two years that she has been under my constant observation at this Infirmary I have ever found her diligent and assiduous in the discharge of her duties, and kind and attentive to the patients under her care.

I can confidently recommend her as in every way competent to undertake not only the duties of a hospital or private nurse, but to superintend an entire ward and to acquit herself of its duties in a satisfactory manner.

(signed) L. F. Halket L.R.C.P.  
London  
House Surgeon

## APPENDIX II

In our correspondence Professor Gandevia describes a booklet (not previously known to the writer) written by a Dr. Bowd on Lucy Osburn — "giving main centres where persons trained by her took charge, with dates". It reads thus:

1870	Mudgee	Shorter
1873	Farban Creek	Bland
1877	Orange	Davies
1879	Parramatta	Pearson
1880	Adelaide	Wilmott
1880	Children's, Glebe	Holden
1881	Brompton (?)	Abbot (sic)
1881	Hobart	Bland
1881	Launceston	Windred
1881	Bathurst	Keyes
1885	Ballarat	Rucher
1885	Young	Neyler

Dr. Gandevia (pers. comm).

"Sources of the above data not specifically stated — but it seems you might easily find reference to Abbott in Osburn's correspondence with Miss Nightingale."

This writer pleads want of mobility and distance as factors that did not allow him to follow this advice.

It seems at least impossible that the Great Brompton Hospital for Chests in London should have to wait until 1881 for Miss Abbott to introduce the new nursing standards. Again the credit in regard to Hobart is given to Nurse Bland in 1881. I hope that this narrative will ensure that Miss Florence Abbott will be given that credit as from January 1876 when, with her selected team, commenced the reorganisation of the old Hobart General Hospital.

Careful work in the various hospital records above, might disclose other inconsistancies in the priority claimed for these Trainees of Miss Osburn at the Sydney Hospital.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mrs. Mary Gordon McRae, State Archivist, provided able assistance and Mrs. Mary Nichols, also of the Archives Department, has made a close study of the subjects of this paper. She produced Miss Freda MacDonnell's splendid study of "Miss Nightingale's Young Ladies", (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1970) which proved of unestimable value.

A similar debt is owed to Dr. M. P. Susman of Sydney for his paper on "Lucy Osburn and her Five Nightingale Nurses" in the Medical Journal of Australia, 1965 Vol. 1 pp. 634-648, whose study of the personalities of these ladies and their subsequent Australian careers is a notable contribution to medical history.

My friend Emeritus Professor Sir Edward Ford has also helped me from his long experience. Dr. Bryan Gandevia has greatly helped me in my search for data of Miss Abbott; while Mrs. Alison Holster of the Library of the Royal College of Physicians has been able to supply the essential dates and particulars of Miss Abbott's training years at the Sydney Infirmary.

In Hobart, Miss P. J. Donnelly, Lady Superintendent of the Royal Hobart Hospital, with Mrs. Mary Nichols kindly supplied me with material they had collected for their own excellent work, "The 100 years History of Nursing at the Hobart Hospital".

I have in my Collection an original mounted print of Miss F. Abbott with the nursing staff at the Hobart General Hospital. It was given to me some thirty years ago by my patient Mrs. Thomas Hopkins who was one of the nurses in the group. I lost the opportunity to ask the names of all the nurses nor did I ask for her personal estimation of Miss Abbott's standing in the eyes of her nursing staff.

Lastly, I must insert my tribute to Mrs. K. A. Walker who completed the notable task of typing my crabbed and minuscule handwriting. What I owe to her patience and kindness it would be extremely hard to describe or even estimate.